

# SECOND PETER

## Chapter 2

### *False Teachers and Their Destruction*

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.<sup>2</sup> Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.<sup>3</sup> In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.<sup>4</sup> For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;<sup>5</sup> if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;<sup>6</sup> if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;<sup>7</sup> and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men<sup>8</sup> (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—<sup>9</sup> if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.<sup>10</sup> This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings;<sup>11</sup> yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord.<sup>12</sup> But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.<sup>13</sup> They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you.<sup>14</sup> With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!<sup>15</sup> They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.<sup>16</sup> But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.<sup>17</sup> These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.<sup>18</sup> For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.<sup>19</sup> They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.<sup>20</sup> If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the

**beginning.** <sup>21</sup> It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. <sup>22</sup> Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

**Ch 2** Extended warning against false teachers; resembles concerns and even wording of the Book of Jude. (TLSB)

**2:1–3** “When they have heard God’s Word, they make light of it again and ignore it. But their wickedness is responsible for this <that they perish>, not God or His election” (FC Ep XI 12). (TLSB)

**2:1** *false prophets*. See 2Ki 18:19; Isa 9:13–17; Jer 5:31; 14:14; 23:30–32. (CSB)

God told Moses to distinguish between true and false prophets (cf Dt 18:21–22). See Jeremiah’s contest with Hananiah in Jer 28:1–17. (tlsb)

*there will be false teachers among you*. Numerous NT passages warn of false teachers who are already present or yet to come (see Mt 24:4–5, 11; Ac 20:29–30; Gal 1:6–9; Php 3:2; Col 2:4, 8, 18, 20–23; 2Th 2:1–3; 1Ti 1:3–7; 4:1–3; 2Ti 3:1–8; 1Jn 2:18–19, 22–23; 2Jn 7–11; Jude 3–4). (CSB)

Those who take the inspired Scriptures and twist or isolate selected passages out of the context of salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ, purely for their own personal gain and glory. (TLSB)

*destructive heresies*. Divisive opinions or teachings that result in the moral and spiritual destruction of those who accept them. (CSB)

False teachings that often promote personal rights and immorality that will always destroy faith in Christ alone. (TLSB)

*the sovereign Lord who bought them*. Does not necessarily mean that the false teachers were believers. Christ’s death paid the penalty for their sin, but it would not become effective for their salvation unless they trusted in Christ as Savior. (However, see vv. 20–22, where it is obvious that the heretics had at least professed knowing the Lord.) (CSB)

False teachers deny the reality of Christ’s redemption through faith alone as the means of salvation. They may call Him “Lord, Lord,” but their lives are a contradiction of His will and Word (cf Lk 6:46). (TLSB)

*swift destruction*. Not immediate physical calamity, but sudden doom, whether at death or at the Lord’s second coming (cf. Mt 24:50–51; 2Th 1:9). (CSB)

Though not seemingly so, those who bring in destructive heresies will eventually be destroyed themselves. Luther: “Just as all prophecy has emanated from the Holy Spirit since the beginning of the world, so this must be true until the end of the world, in order that nothing but God’s Word may be preached. Yet it has always happened that there have been false teachers alongside the true prophets and God’s Word. And so it will remain. Therefore since you now have God’s Word, you must expect to have false teachers too.... They will retain the terms ‘God,’ ‘Christ,’ ‘faith,’ ‘church,’ ‘Baptism,’ ‘Sacrament’ and let them remain. Under these terms, however, they will proceed to establish something different” (AE 30:168, 170). (TLSB)

**2:2** *shameful ways*. Open, extreme immorality not held in check by any sense of shame. (CSB)

*way of truth*. See Ps 119:30. The Christian faith is not only correct doctrine but also correct living. (CSB)

*blasphemed*. In the strict sense, blasphemy refers to the misuse of the divine name and the divine works (cf Lv 24:10–23). Here the word is used in the more general sense of “defame, revile, slander.” (TLSB)

**2:3** *In their greed*. They will be motivated by a desire for money and will commercialize the Christian faith to their own selfish advantage. (CSB)

*long been hanging over them*. Long ago, in OT times, their condemnation was declared (see vv. 4–9 for OT examples of the fact that judgment is coming on the wicked). (CSB)

*destruction has not been sleeping*. Although delay makes it seem that they have escaped God’s judgment, destruction is a reality that is sure to come upon them. (CSB)

During all the time the false teachers are active, their condemnation is also active. It only appears as though they will escape destruction. (TLSB)

**2:4–10a** Three OT examples illustrate how God rescues His people. (TLSB)

**2:4–8** Three examples showing that God will rescue the godly and destroy the wicked. (CSB)

**2:4** *angels when they sinned*.† Some claim that this sin was the one referred to in Ge 6:2, where the sons of God are said to have intermarried with the daughters of men, meaning (according to this view) that angels married human women. The offspring of those marriages are said to have been the Nephilim (Ge 6:4; see notes on Ge 6:2, 4). But since it appears impossible for angels, who are spirits, to have sexual relations with women, the sin referred to in this verse probably occurred before the fall of Adam and Eve. The angels who fell became the devil and the evil angels (probably the demons and evil spirits referred to in the NT). (CSB)

Fallen angels. Though the Bible gives no single extended account of this fall, it contains scattered allusions. (TLSB)

*sent them to hell.* See NIV text note. (CSB)

The stern judgment and damnation to which God sentenced the evil angels, in which they are held captive and bound. Luther: “God cast them [the angels who sinned] into hell. There they don’t suffer punishment as yet, although they are condemned. For if they were already punished, the devils wouldn’t engage in so much knavery” (AE 54:447). (TLSB)

*Tartarus* was the term used by the Greeks to designate the place where the most wicked spirits were sent to be punished. Why some evil angels are imprisoned and others are free to serve Satan as demons is not explained in Scripture. (CSB)

*judgment.* The final judgment, probably associated with the great white throne judgment of Rev 20:11–15. (CSB)

**2:5** *ungodly people.* See Ge 6:5, 11–12. (CSB)

*preacher of righteousness.* A description of Noah found nowhere else in Scripture. However, similar descriptions are used of him in Josephus (*Antiquities*, 1.3.1), *1 Clement* (7.6; 9.4) and the *Sibylline Oracles* (1.128). (CSB)

Noah’s righteousness was proclaimed by his walking with God (Gn 6:9) and being obedient to His will and Word (Gn 6:22) in the midst of a generation whose every thought “was only evil continually” (Gn 6:5). During the 120 years when Noah was building the ark, he warned the people to repent. (TLSB)

*seven others.* Noah’s wife, three sons and three daughters-in-law (Noah was the eighth; see 1Pe 3:20). (CSB)

**2:6** *condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.* See Ge 19. (CSB)

God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 19) to serve as a reminder to later generations that unrighteousness, false teaching, immorality, and evil (be they in Lot’s day, Peter’s day, or today) will eventually result in the carrying out of God’s judgment. (TLSB)

**2:7** *righteous Lot.* Though he had many faults, Lot did have faith in the Lord, and he trusted God’s Word. E.g., he left Sodom and Gomorrah when warned; he relied on God’s promises of deliverance. (TLSB)

*distressed by the filthy lives.* See Ge 19:4–9. How Lot could be so distressed, how he could be called a “righteous man,” and yet offer to turn his two daughters over to the wicked townsmen to be sexually abused is difficult to understand apart from a knowledge of the code of honor characteristic of that day (see note on Ge 19:8). (CSB)

**2:8** Living among the sensual, lawless Sodomites caused Lot great distress. This serves as a warning for believers today. Cf Gn 19:1–22. (TLSB)

**2:9** States the point made in vv. 4–8—the wicked whose coming Peter predicts will surely be punished. (CSB)

**2:10** *This is especially true.* The heretics of Peter’s day are certain to come under judgment for two main reasons: 1. They follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature, perhaps referring to homosexuality, the sin of the Sodomites (see Ge 19:5). At least the author has in mind a similar inordinate sexual practice. 2. They despise authority. *slander celestial beings.* A specific example of despising authority. This could refer to the slander of earthly dignitaries such as church leaders, which might well be expected from such shameless peddlers of error. On the other hand, it could refer to the blaspheming of angels, as the NIV text suggests. This view seems more likely since the parallel passage in Jude 8–10 is speaking of angels. (CSB)

*lust of defiling passion.* Possible reference to homosexuality, the sin of the Sodomites (cf Gn 19:5). Luther: “ ‘To indulge in the lust of defiling passion’ is to live like an irrational beast according to one’s own notion and all lust” (AE 30:180). (TLSB)

*despise authority.* Rejecting people God charged with faithfully attending to His Word and His work, be it His Son, His angels, His prophets, His pastors, or His teachers. Cf Jude 8–10. (TLSB)

*they blaspheme the glorious ones.* To speak against God’s angels or anything of God is to speak against God. (TLSB)

**2:11** *angels ... do not bring slanderous accusations.* Even good angels, who might have more right to do so because of their greater power, do not bring such accusations against inferior evil angels. (CSB)

Though greater in might and in power than fallen angels, God’s angels do not assume the place of God by condemning the fallen. Such a task should be left to God. False teachers will always assume a place that is not theirs and proceed to sit in judgment of all things and all people. (TLSB)

**2:12** *matters they do not understand.* The heresy to which Peter refers may have been an early form of second-century Gnosticism (see Introduction to 1 John: Gnosticism) that claimed to possess special, esoteric knowledge. If so, it is ironic that those who professed special knowledge acted out of abysmal ignorance, and the result was arrogant blasphemy. (CSB)

*like brute beasts.* A scathing denunciation. They are like irrational animals, whose lives are guided by mere instinct and who are born merely to be slaughtered. Destruction is their final lot. (CSB)

*born to be caught and destroyed.* Destruction of false teachers begins with the self-destruction brought about by their defiling passions and culminates with their eternal destruction in hell. (TLSB)

*destroyed in their destruction.* Unless they repent, doom will completely envelop all the unrepentant. (TLSB)

**2:13** *suffering wrong as the wage.* Although false teachers expect to profit from evil deeds, God will defraud them of any gain they hope to realize. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. (TLSB)

*carouse in broad daylight.* See 1Th 5:7. Even the pagan world carried on their corrupt practices under cover of darkness, but these heretics were utterly shameless. (CSB)

Demonstration of their shameful and shameless arrogance. (TLSB)

*in their pleasures while they feast with you.* See NIV text note. Jude 12 without doubt reads “love feasts,” which may well have been the intended reading here. These false teachers seem to have been involved in the sacred feasts of brotherly love that, in the early church, accompanied the Lord’s Supper. In fact, it appears that they injected their carousing into these holy observances and delighted in their shameless acts. (CSB)

The false teachers have worked their way into the Christian community to the point that they even attend the Lord’s Supper, at which they carouse in shameful ways. “Peter predicted that there would be godless bishops who would abuse the alms of the Church for luxury and neglect the ministry.... Therefore, let those who defraud the Church know that they will pay God the penalty for this crime” (Tr 82). (TLSB)

**2:14** *eyes full of adultery.* Lit. “eyes full of an adulteress,” which means that they desired every woman they saw, viewing her as a potential sex partner. (CSB)

*never stop sinning.* Their eyes serve as constant instruments of lust. (CSB)

*seduce the unstable.* For a parallel use of the Greek word for “seduce” see Jas 1:14. It depicts the fisherman who attempts to lure and catch fish with bait. (CSB)

Those seduced by false teachers, because they are not grounded in the whole testimony of the Scriptures. (TLSB)

*experts in greed.* The Greek text implies that they had exercised themselves like an athlete, not in physical activity but in greed. (CSB)

*Accursed children!* Hebraic way of saying that they are damned people under the curse of God. (TLSB)

**2:15** *way of Balaam son of Beor.* See Nu 22–24. Balaam was bent on cursing Israel, though God had forbidden it. He wanted the money Balak offered him. Similarly these false teachers apparently were guilty of attempting to extract money from naive listeners. For a donkey to rebuke the prophet’s madness reflects not only on the foolishness of Balaam but also on that of the false teachers of Peter’s day. (CSB)

A diviner who, when God would not let him curse the people of Israel (cf Nu 22–24), proceeded to corrupt the people by promoting immorality and idolatry (cf Nu 25; 31:16). (TLSB)

**2:16** In mentioning Balaam’s donkey, Peter brings the “bold and willful” (v 10) down to earth. Balaam was hired to pronounce a curse against God’s people. By having him rebuked by a donkey, God showed what He thought of proud Balaam (Nu 22:21–41). God’s rebuke may be delivered through natural means, supernatural means (as with Balaam), or historical events. But it is always delivered clearly through faithful preaching of the Scriptures and brotherly counsel based on the Scriptures. (TLSB)

**2:17** *springs without water.* A picture of cruel deception. The thirsty traveler comes to the spring expecting cool, refreshing water but finds it dry. So the false teachers promise satisfying truth but in reality have nothing to offer. (CSB)

False teachers possess no ability to give life and satisfy spiritual thirst. (TLSB)

*mists driven by a storm.* Gone before a drop of moisture falls. (CSB)

They lack substance and are transitory. (TLSB)

*Blackest darkness.* Their destiny is hell. (CSB)

Luther: “To be sure, they [false teachers] live well now and fare as they themselves desire; but an eternal darkness will come upon them, even though they do not believe or feel this” (AE 30:188). (TLSB)

**2:18** *mouth empty, boastful words.* Words that sound impressive to the new convert but in reality have nothing to offer. (CSB)

*entice.* See note on v. 14 (“seduce”). (CSB)

*people who are just escaping.* New converts who have just broken away from pagan friends. Thus the depraved false teachers prey on new converts, who have not yet had a chance to develop spiritual resistance. (CSB)

False teachers enticed new converts as they were turning away from the pagan lifestyle, which still held strong attraction. Is it possible to fall from the faith? Yes. The final condition of such a person, Jesus says, “is worse than the first” (cf Lk 11:24–26) (TLSB)

**2:19** *They promise them freedom.* Probably freedom from moral restraint (cf. 1Co 6:12–13; Gal 5:13). The very ones who promise freedom from bondage to rules and regulations are themselves slaves of depravity. Freedom from law resulted in bondage to sin, and liberty was turned into license. (CSB)

False teachers lure people away from the faith by perverting the freedom of the Gospel into an excuse for indulgence. They hide behind the masks of convenience, ease, practicality, etc. (TLSB)

*enslaved.* Unrestrained by God’s Word and Commandments, such freedom leads only to slavery. Real freedom is found not in sin, but in Christ (Jn 8:31–32). (TLSB)

**2:20–22†** This passage is a solemn warning. It describes particularly the false teachers, and teaches that a believer may lose his faith—if he shuts himself off from the means of grace, by which the Holy Spirit sustains and strengthens faith. He knows the Lord; he escapes the world’s corruption; he knows the way of righteousness. Then he turns away from the message and goes back to his old way of life. His knowledge is said to have been genuine; his change of life was real; and his return to his old way of life was not superficial. (CSB)

**2:20–21** *worse ... better.* The sin against the light—apostasy in the face of known and acknowledged truth—has unforeseeable consequences. The heart made alive in Christ becomes hardened against the saving power of God’s Word and grace, making it more difficult, if not impossible, for one to be turned back to Christ, (TLSB)

**2:20** *If they have escaped the corruption of the world.*† A reference to false teachers who had once been believers in Christ. Their knowledge of Christ had at least produced a change in life-style. (CSB)

*knowledge of our Lord.* Knowing who Christ is, namely, our Savior, who forgives us our sin out of pure grace. (TLSB)

*again entangled in it and overcome.* A complete return to the old sinful pattern of life. (CSB)

Like a fish caught by a fisherman, the false teachers (who at one time had been faithful Christians) and their disciples have been caught by the lust of their own defiling passions (v 10). (TLSB)

**2:21** *better ... not to have known the way of righteousness.* Knowledge of the way increases one’s responsibility and his hardness of heart if he then rejects it. In its early days, Christianity was known as “the way” (Ac 9:2; 18:25; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). (CSB)

*sacred command.* The whole Christian message that people are commanded to receive. (CSB)



The whole of the Christian proclamation, with the emphasis on the ethical dimensions of that proclamation and on the fact that it claims man for Christ (cf 3:2; Mt 28:20; 1Tm 6:14). (TLSB)

*delivered.* Taught. (TLSB)

**2:22** *A dog returns ... A sow ... goes back.* † A proverb to illustrate the return from the purity of the gospel message and a life of sanctification to the filth of sin and shame. (CSB)

Peter closes his warnings with two proverbs (the first from Pr 26:11; the second from an unknown secular source) to indicate the abiding reality of the sinful nature in every person—believer and unbeliever. In this context, dogs and sows, both unclean animals, are likened to people who reject God’s Word. Luther: “Through Baptism these people threw out unbelief, had their unclean way of life washed away, and entered into a pure life of faith and love. Now they fall away into unbelief and their own works, and they soil themselves again in filth.... But if you want to become pious, you must ask God to give you a genuine faith, and you must begin to desist from unbelief. When you receive faith, then good works will come automatically, and you will lead a pure and chaste life. Otherwise you will preserve yourself by no other means. And even if you are able to conceal the knave in your heart for a while, yet he will finally emerge” (AE 30:190–91). (TLSB)

**Ch 2** Our Lord says, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33; cf 2Pt 2:9). The devil, the world, and our own sinful nature are ever seeking to overcome us through our tribulations. The way of escape is through His Holy Word and Sacraments, for this is how He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith. • O Lord, having overcome the world, come to me and give me the strength to endure patiently the trials that afflict me and finally to overcome them and win the victory. Amen. (TLSB)